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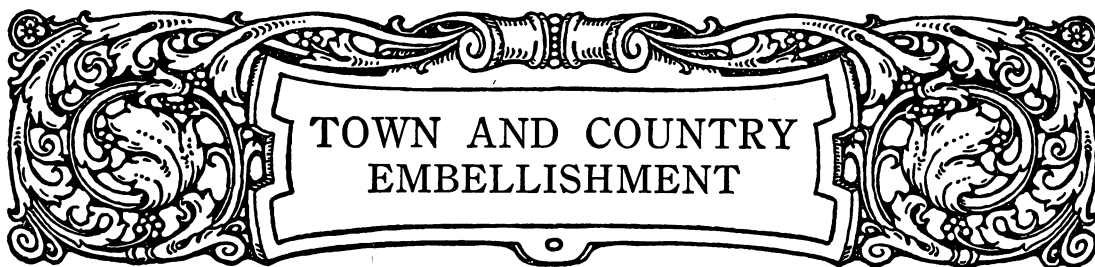
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THE WATER-TANK NUISANCE

By CHARLES I. BERG

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THE architect who is retained to design a building first concentrates his thoughts on the general requirements of the interior, and as the plan evolves in his mind the form and mass of the exterior gradually molds itself.

The necessities of the problem are first considered, the general disposition of the rooms, the stairways, the halls, the means of exit, the spacing of windows, the height of ceilings, the heating, the plumbing, the electric lighting, and the various ramifications which are described in his specifications; but before all this has taken definite shape the exterior is beginning to take form. The general silhouette of the façade has been determined, the height of the building, the number of floors, the renting space, etc. Now, it would seem from the many examples about the city that the architect, believing the cornice to be the crowning feature, heaves a sigh, draws a long breath and cheerfully exclaims "*Voilà, c'est fini.*"

But this is just where he falls short; in other words, he has donned his evening dress but has crowned himself with his derby instead of his top-hat. It is most unfortunate that the average architect fails to consider what must by necessity, especially in a modern commercial building, come above the cornice, such as the overhead gearing for the elevators, often the superintendent's living rooms, but *always* the water tank or tanks. That these are not deemed a part of the architectural scheme is evident from some of the illustrations here presented.

To rely on the city water pressure, even for a building only four stories high, would be an error; therefore the gravity tank, or some form of pressure tank, becomes just as positive a requirement as the roof itself. Then why not squarely face the problem and house it properly, either by embodying it in the general design, or clothing it in such a manner that it will appeal to the eye as a charming adjunct or feature, as a topping out, or, to use a more architectural term, a crowning motif, as was done in the Charles Building, see Fig. 4, page 114, where the tanks, dressing and toilet rooms for the elevator men are placed in the attic story just under the cupola or lantern.

The tank is just as essential as the cornice, yet it is left in its ungainly shape without a thought as to its adaptability to place, without a moment's consideration as to its *harmony* with the building it crowns. They all look alike.

The fact that one is perched on a Gothic Building, another on a building of Italian Renaissance design, and still another on a Colonial Building, is not taken

into consideration. If its function is to supply an office building or a theatre or a shirtwaist factory, or an establishment devoted to the very latest fashions as purveyor to the most fastidious in dress, or a studio devoted to the highest ideals in art—it matters not.

These are not figurative assertions or examples, but can be borne out in fact. In the studio instance above mentioned the writer, walking with one of the heads of this great company, suddenly brought to his attention at an excellent point of vantage from the street, the spindle-shaped three-legged tank perched on his building; only two legs of the support could be seen from the point of view. With an air of good-humored disgust his laconic reply was "What an ugly disposition you have," to which I answered "Not half as ugly as the imposition perpetrated." Yet having once awaked him to the thought, the bond of friendship has been strengthened.

The tank and pent house has by custom been accepted generally as an ungainly weed, the difference as to variety being whether it shall be of the wooden mushroom type, placed squat on the roof, or of the cylindrical and conical type generally perched on three iron trussed legs—three are cheaper than four and look more ridiculous.

It is not to be inferred that every tank or tank enclosure should be a work of art, but it should be fully considered from an architectural standpoint, first in its relation to the building and its location on the building, and again its relation to its environment, not only as to whether it can be seen from the street but whether it is in the midst of other and important high buildings.

Along our principal avenues and on buildings surrounding out squares and parks it is my contention that the pent house and tank should be a part of the general scheme of the architecture of the building on which they are placed. It might be argued "Who can see them?" Perhaps as to native New Yorkers, a great majority of them never do see them, so accustomed have they become to their existence. But the vast population of strangers, however, ever crowding our great sea of important hotels, as they look down from their comfortable and artistic surroundings on the roof-tops of the great Metropolis, and the traveller who glimpses them for the first time from the well-appointed offices in our wonderful skyscrapers, these are the ones whose eyes are offended by such a view of incongruity as shown in the illustration taken from an upper window in the Times Building, see Fig. 2, page 114. The same view can be had from all the neighboring hotels; in fact, from almost any building eight or ten stories

in height; not to the same marked degree perhaps, but often more offensive, especially where the tanks form an immediate foreground to a building or buildings of importance, or part of the skyline when the eye is focused on some well-designed monument, such as the Arch in Washington Square, see Fig. 1, page 114, or the Metropolitan Tower as seen from Union Square, see Fig. 3, page 114, as shown in accompanying illustrations.

This very necessity of housing the various adjuncts above the highest rentable portion of the building gives excellent opportunity for design, and if it received a little more careful consideration we would be spared the monotony of so many truncated buildings.

It is pleasing to note that within the last two or three years there has been a marked improvement, and wherever the proper housing has been provided the building assumes a finished appearance and retains an individuality of its own.

The assertion that "Necessity is the Mother of Invention" is just as true of art as it is of mechanics. As a result we have the interesting gargoyles to carry off the water from the eaves of the roofs

where leaders are not provided, the ever graceful flying buttress of Gothic Architecture, the picturesque chimneys of Tudor Architecture, and the beautiful examples of belfrys throughout the world. These graced the upper portions of buildings. In most cases there were no higher buildings in their immediate surroundings.

In New York there is a law that no apartment house can be built more than 12 stories high, yet hotels or office buildings can soar almost to limitless height. It is obvious therefore that there is quite a population far above the street level, and far above the average height of buildings, which should be pleased. The urban architect of to-day has then this further problem to solve, for he should appeal to that "aerial" population, as it has been so aptly called.

Then why not give the grouping of the tanks and pent houses proper thought, make of them picturesque accessories of architecture and a pleasing background to the flat deck of the main roof, which in the modern fireproof buildings lends itself so admirably to recreation purposes?

Charles I. Berg

REMARKS BY THE EDITORS

GOD has a special love for every man who creates anything that is—Beautiful.

Per contra, he who perpetuates an Ugly thing is a Servant of Satan.

Why? Because at the end of his six days of labor the Creator and Master-artist said: "Let Beauty be the Universal Law." How do we know this?

When we contemplate nature we find her governed, everywhere, by a Cosmic Urge—ever working to make every type of thing—Beautiful. Be it in the bowels of the earth, where form themselves the ruby and the sapphire, or on the mountains of the moon, where bends the wondrous rainbow, Beauty is the sole goal of the Almighty!

Every flower, tree or shell; every insect, butterfly or bird; every animal, fish or fowl; every crystal and snowflake, when perfect; every 'form—from Man to God, is Beautiful . . . except when nature's process is hampered by cosmic accidents—or by the stupidity of man. This teaches us that the Creator, like every one of his creatures, from Monad to Man, is bent upon Self-Expression through forms—not of Ugliness—but of Beauty; and that, for Him, the pursuit of the Beautiful is the Supreme Law.

Therefore the man who creates an ugly thing ignorantly interferes with the working of the universal law of God, which is ignominious enough; but the man who, deliberately, prefers the ugly to the beautiful, is either an imperfect or an over-perfect product of nature—either an embryo or a degenerate. In either case: a misfit in the scheme of creation, and a source of pain to all normal mankind. Because, since even a reptile is governed by the universal law and always rejects and flees the ugly and prefers and seeks the beautiful: normal men feel that the upward urge of the beautiful tends always to lift man higher and higher while the depressing drag of the ugly ever tends to pull him down.

Therefore, while any full-grown man or set of men may be pardoned for Creating an ugly thing in a community—because of childishness—when they are Warned and shown that what they have created is Ugly and therefore an eye-sore and a social pest, if then they refuse to Abate that ugliness and Nuisance, they are either degenerates—because no longer able to see and feel like normal beings, or they are criminal despisers of their fellow-men.

On the other hand a man or set of men who remove the ugly and create the beautiful anywhere in a community or in the State are the truest benefactors of their fellows and live longest in the affections of mankind.

Besides, they live longest in the land which the Lord their God has given them, because: to seek and worship the beautiful in nature and in its reflection—Art—is to worship God, who is the incarnation of the Beautiful, and because the active love of the beautiful, as manifested in the waters, on the plains and mountains and in the wondrous sky, is a psychic life-giving force, tending to lengthen the life of every human being who thus worships God.

It is because of this that the Protestant Church, which, since the Reformation, has more or less scorned the beautiful in its temples of worship, has made a nullifying error, which has helped along the gradual loosening of its hold on the imagination and soul of mankind.

It is because of this, that the Artists and those laymen who create what is truly beautiful are the favored of God, live longest and will finally at the Banquet of the World sit at the head of the table.

Now every Water-Tank in New York City is a mass of Ugliness, and in its most distressing expression and needlessly and heedlessly so. They can be transformed into objects of Beauty easily and cheaply. How this can be done is shown in the above article by Mr. Berg.



FIG. 1. AN UGLY WATER-TANK FINELY FRAMED
See page 110



Copyright, Jackson & Whitman N. Y., 1916.
FIG. 2. FLOCK OF WATER-TANKS FROM THE TIMES TOWER
See page 110



FIG. 3. UNION SQUARE. ELEVEN TANKS IN SIGHT.
THERE ARE MORE OF THESE TO THE RIGHT
See page 110



FIG. 4. A SOLUTION OF THE WATER-TANK NUISANCE.
THE CHARLES BUILDING
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